

**Hearing on
Metropolitan Police Department Performance
in FY 2003 and FY 2004**

**Committee on the Judiciary
Kathy Patterson, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia**



**Testimony of Charles H. Ramsey
Chief of Police
Metropolitan Police Department**

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Good afternoon, Chairperson Patterson, other members of the Committee and Council, staff and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to present this opening statement concerning the Metropolitan Police Department's performance during fiscal year 2003 and year-to-date for fiscal 2004. Several other members of the Department's Command Staff are here today to assist me in responding to your questions. The text of my prepared statement is posted on the Police Department's website, mpdc.dc.gov.

Fiscal 2003 was another year in which the Metropolitan Police Department faced a number of unique challenges – everything from sniper attacks in our region and elevated terrorism threat levels, to snow emergencies and Hurricane Isabel. When unusual events such as these take place, the members of our Department are called upon to put aside their own individual and family responsibilities, and to focus on ensuring the safety and security of the public at large. I am extremely proud to lead a Department of men and women who continually demonstrate the commitment to serve the people of the District of Columbia during difficult times, even if it means tremendous personal sacrifice. Speaking of personal sacrifice and service, I also want to publicly acknowledge and thank the more than 50 sworn MPD members who are currently on military leave, serving our country overseas. Our thoughts and prayers are with these brave citizen-soldiers in the hope that they will return home soon and safely.

But while fiscal 2003 will, in many ways, be remembered for its major events and emergencies, the Metropolitan Police Department remained squarely focused on our priorities of neighborhood crime, neighborhood policing and neighborhood problem-solving. Being the primary law enforcement agency of our nation's capital, the MPD will always have unique challenges and special responsibilities that no other police department in America will ever face. But our primary responsibility and our overriding focus – in FY 2003 and in every other year – remain the safety of our neighborhoods.

I am pleased to report that our Department has made steady and significant progress in FY 2003 and FY 2004 in meeting the challenges of neighborhood safety. Both crime rates and clearance rates are headed in the right direction. Some long-planned enhancements have come to fruition, including creation of the Family Liaison Specialist Unit, a hiring plan to bring our sworn ranks up to 3,800, and improvements in the Public Safety Communications Center. And implementation of other priorities – including restructuring of the Police Service Areas and new legislative and management reforms affecting officer availability – are moving forward. There are certainly new challenges on the horizon – not the least of which is the safety of our schools and the MPD's role in providing for school security. But I feel confident that our Department is ready to meet those challenges, as we continue to work at driving down our city's crime rate.

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Looking at our performance in terms of crime, we are seeing an overall downward trend in reported offenses. Preliminary data for calendar year 2003 indicate a nearly 3 percent reduction in DC Code Index Crimes. I should caution that these are preliminary statistics that are subject to change, as we finish compiling the official data for reporting to the FBI. In 2003, we continued to experience increases in sexual assaults, stolen autos and, to a lesser extent, robberies. Those increases, however, were more than offset by reductions in aggravated assaults, burglaries, thefts and homicides, which

declined by about 5 percent last year. The year-end decline in homicides is noteworthy, given the fact that in early May of last year, DC was experiencing a 25 percent increase in murders. Had that trend continued, we would have ended 2003 with approximately 325 homicides, as opposed to the actual total of 248.

I am also pleased to report that the positive trends of 2003 have continued into calendar year 2004. Our preliminary statistics show an overall 6 percent reduction in serious crime during the first two months of the year, and a 17 percent reduction in homicides. In fact, we ended February with only six homicides, compared with 18 last February. The last month in which the number of homicides was in the single digits in DC was May 2001, when there were eight. I am very hopeful that the positive trends of February – and really the last several months – will mark a significant turnaround in DC’s crime picture.

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There are undoubtedly many factors contributing to our recent crime trends. I want to take this opportunity to highlight what I see as some of the more significant factors.

Improvements in Visibility and Crime-Fighting Capacity. During fiscal years 2003 and 2004, the MPD has implemented a number of new crime-fighting initiatives. These have included both short-term efforts to address critical crime problems, as well as longer-range efforts, such as the restructuring of the PSAs, that should enhance our effectiveness well into the future. All of these efforts are geared toward boosting police presence and effectiveness in DC neighborhoods. In calendar year 2003 alone, our officers removed close to 2,000 firearms from the streets of the District – that’s on top of the more 1,900 guns seized in 2002 and almost 400 so far this year. And each week, our officers are averaging 750 or more adult arrests for a variety of crimes. So our officer activity levels remain high.

As you know, I implemented a Crime Initiative last August in response to a sudden and unusually violent outbreak of crime in parts of our city. In declaring the initiative, I suspended the scheduling provisions of Article 24 of the Department’s collective bargaining agreement with the Fraternal Order of Police, and gave commanders greater flexibility in making assignments and setting schedules in response to crime problems in their communities. Each district also developed specific strategies to combat their most pressing crime problems. The initiative lasted into early January. During that four-month period, overall crime declined and we were able to get a handle on many neighborhood crime problems. In addition, the Crime Initiative spawned some important changes in how districts are assigning their personnel and working to combat crime. For example, during the initiative, the Third District created a Street Crimes Unit that continues to produce impressive results in terms of arrests and gun and narcotics recoveries. While I will not hesitate to enact another Crime Initiative if conditions warrant it in the future, I am confident that our PSA Restructuring should provide the added flexibility that will make it less likely that we would have to suspend this part of the union contract.

During FY 03, we took a number of steps to enhance the visibility of our uniformed PSA officers. These include a program of what we call “block surveys” – or having PSA officers spend time outside their vehicles, knocking on doors, introducing themselves to residents and business people,

and listening to their concerns. We have also increased foot and bike patrols in some areas. With the PSA Restructuring, we intend to expand the number of foot patrols and make them regular assignments. Another change during the past year was the adoption of our “flashing lights” policy, in which officers are instructed to activate the white, alternating lights on their cruisers, as a way to make their presence in the community more obvious.

In addition to enhancing the visibility of our PSA officers, our Department has become much more aggressive and strategic in deploying additional, discretionary resources in our neighborhoods. During our daily Crime Briefings at Police Headquarters, district commanders must identify – and justify – how they intend to deploy their Focused Mission Teams and “power shift” officers to best meet the crime problems in their communities *on that particular day*. Our redeployed officers continue to be assigned to targeted neighborhoods five evenings a week, and they are being given more specific information about the crime problems they are to address. “Redeploys” are those officers who normally work in specialized or administrative units, but who are assigned to a neighborhood patrol one week out of every seven. During FY 03, we also began to give officers in our specialized units – including canine, horse mounted patrol and the Emergency Response Team – specific neighborhood-based assignments every evening. These additional officers provide important support to our PSA officers and an added presence in our communities. I have heard – loudly and clearly – from this Council and from the people you represent that you want to see more police in our neighborhoods, and we have worked very hard to make that happen.

As you know, FY 03 also brought challenges in term of gang violence, particularly violence among Latino gangs in parts of Northwest. Our Department responded to that challenge quickly and decisively, by convening the Gang Intervention Partnership last August. This multi-agency collaborative worked effectively to get a handle on the problem – our Gang officers were instrumental in closing several cases – and the partnership continues to carry out a variety of enforcement, intervention and prevention strategies focusing on Latino gangs. One important byproduct of this partnership has been the development of better intelligence and intelligence networks on gangs. In many cases, our officers have been able to learn about developing gang hostilities much sooner and, therefore, respond much more effectively.

During FY 03, the Department also intensified our focus on quality-of-life issues in our neighborhoods. We started the “Operation Fight Back” concept – a series of one-day, concentrated, multi-agency assaults on blight in a particular area. During “Fight Backs,” arrest warrants are served, abandoned autos are towed, graffiti and trash are cleaned up, broken street lights are replaced and other steps are taken to clean up and secure the community. Our goal is to conduct at least one “Operation Fight Back” a month in each police district. These concentrated, one-day clean-ups are being supplemented by more consistent, day-to-day support from other city agencies in targeting disorder. Under the leadership of City Administrator Robert Bobb, the District’s CORE Teams and Neighborhood Services Coordinators are working more closely with the police on crime and disorder issues.

Also during FY 03, our Department began enforcing DC’s Anti-Loitering/Drug Free Zone law. This law allows me to declare an area that has experienced significant drug activity as a “drug free zone” for a period of up to 120 hours. Signs are posted, and police presence in the area is increased. Officers have the power to disband groups of people who are congregating for the purpose of illegal

drug activity – and to arrest them for loitering if they refuse. Since last April, we have conducted 89 drug free zones, including one that is currently operating in PSA 302, in the 14th and Euclid area of Northwest. And although I am not aware of our officers having made any arrests for loitering in the drug free zones, they have made numerous arrests for drugs and other crimes, and have served to disrupt some drug markets.

Some of our more recent crime-fighting initiatives have included hot spot enforcement efforts and the PSA Restructuring plan. Our Department has identified 14 hot spots, in six of the seven police districts, that will be the targets of intensified efforts to identify and remove violent criminals. The first of these hot spot initiatives is taking place in the Sursum Corda area of Northwest. We are working closely with other criminal justice agencies – including the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, the US Attorney's Office and the courts – to identify the most active offenders in the area and to hold them accountable. The strategy also involves working with the CORE Team agencies to tow abandoned cars and aggressively target other environmental issues that may contribute to crime in the community. Over the past month, our officers have made numerous arrests and recovered several guns in the Sursum Corda area, as part of this hot spot initiative. We will be applying the lessons learned in Sursum Corda to other parts of the city where hot spot strategies are being developed.

I spoke at length on the PSA Restructuring plan during last week's hearing, so I will not go into detail on that today. Suffice it say that I believe this plan will help to improve police service in our neighborhoods and support hot spot enforcement, anti-gang efforts and other crime-fighting initiatives.

Improvements in 9-1-1 Response and Customer Service. Another area of concern has been the MPD's performance with respect to emergency and non-emergency communications – 9-1-1 and 3-1-1. During fiscal year 2003, our Department made significant progress in restoring what was, admittedly, a broken system, and those improvements are continuing into fiscal 2004.

Last year at this time, our Department promised to hire 59 new civilian professional call-takers by the end of the summer, thus reducing our reliance on sworn police officers to handle call-taking. We met our hiring goal, and we did so ahead of schedule.

By continuing to professionalize our staff, and by providing better leadership and supervision at the Public Safety Communications Center, we have made dramatic gains in performance as well. Early in fiscal 2003, the percentage of 9-1-1 calls answered within five seconds was abysmal – as low as 56 percent at one time. Today, the percentage of calls answered within five seconds is up to 80 percent, even more in some weeks. That is still below our performance goal of 90 percent, but we are tracking these numbers very closely and I am confident we will be meeting our performance goal by the end of FY 04. In addition, the number of people who call 9-1-1 and hang up before their call is answered has been cut in half.

In addition to these performance improvements, we have put in place a number of management and technical enhancements to our emergency communications system. At the urging of this Committee, we developed with the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department a joint investigative complaint process for individuals who are dissatisfied with the service they receive from the PSCC.

We have also emphasized customer service and courtesy in our training. As a result, citizen complaints are down, and our rankings in the Mayor's Customer Service Telephone Tester program have shot up – from near the bottom a few years ago to a solid passing grade in the most recent round of testing. Also in the area of emergency communications and response, our Department instituted a new dispatch policy in fiscal 2003 that more logically distinguishes among calls for service, so that we can give priority response to the most serious emergencies. Under the leadership of the Office of the Chief Technology Officer, we also implemented a new digital radio system that has boosted coverage, security and clarity of our voice communications – and enhanced officer safety in the process.

We still face serious challenges with 9-1-1 and 3-1-1, not the least of which is the continued growing demand for service. Since 1999, the total number of calls for police service has increased by more than 30 percent, and we are now handling approximately 2 million calls for service a year. The development of the new Unified Communications Center and continued technological and managerial improvements will help the District meet these challenges.

Improvements in Criminal Investigations. During FY 03 and continuing into FY 04, we have devoted considerable time and energy to improving the investigative process and raising our clearance rates. As you know, I re-centralized the investigative function back in FY 02, and created the Office of the Superintendent of Detectives to oversee – and be accountable for – all criminal investigations in the Department. We created a Violent Crimes Branch to investigate homicides and, more recently, a Sexual Assault Unit to focus on these crimes involving adults.

During FY 03, our focus continued to be on training and accountability – on ensuring that we are providing our detectives with the tools and resources they need to do the job, and then holding them and their supervisors accountable for producing. The results thus far are encouraging. Our homicide closure rate rose from 55 percent in calendar year 2002 to 60 percent in 2003. That puts us a few percentage points above the average for cities of our size. And so far this year, our homicide closure rate is at 72 percent, which is remarkably high for this early in the year.

One of the factors behind the improvements in our homicide closure rate has been the work of our Homicide Prevention Project, or HPP. This project combines violent crimes, narcotics and other personnel in a coordinated effort to reduce homicides by identifying offenders in targeted areas experiencing violence. From last April through December, the HPP helped to close 25 murder cases. In addition, officers made 576 felony arrests and 226 misdemeanor arrests, and recovered more than a million dollars worth of drugs and 35 guns.

In addition to improving our performance in criminal investigations, we also made significant improvements in our support of the victims of crime, especially the surviving family members of homicide victims. Earlier this year, we announced the formation of our Family Liaison Specialist Unit – a small group of dedicated professionals who are providing badly needed outreach, support and information to family members of homicide victims. Currently we have two family liaison specialists – soon to be three, with the addition of a bilingual staff member. Mrs. Patterson, I know that you have had a chance to sit down and meet the staff of this unit, and I trust that you saw the dedication and compassion they bring to their work. In addition, I am now meeting regularly with a task force representing the Survivors of Homicide, ROOT and other victim support groups, to ensure

that our policies, procedures and operations are supportive of victims and their family members. I am confident that with these reforms, the survivors of homicide victims are getting better and more compassionate service from the MPD. Other victim service improvements over the last year have included a change in policy to provide police reports free of charge to victims and more timely distribution to eligible victims of information packets about DC's victims compensation program.

I mentioned earlier that, when compared with other cities of our size, the MPD's performance in homicide investigations is now above average. I want to assure the Committee that I am not satisfied with simply being "above average." I will not be satisfied until the MPD sets the standard for large cities when it comes to criminal investigations and closures. I do feel we are significantly closer to that goal today than we were a year ago.

Improvements in Agency Management and Accountability. One other area I want to cover today is overall agency management and accountability. I know this Committee has expressed a keen interest in a number of management issues, and I want to bring you up to date on some of them.

First, however, I want to touch on the issue of accountability, because I think it is very important in the context of this discussion. A number of the different initiatives I have highlighted today have one thing in common: they place a heavy emphasis on supervisory and management accountability. Perhaps the best example – and where accountability is really coming together in the MPD – is our daily Crime Briefings. Each morning at 10 o'clock, Executive Assistant Chief Mike Fitzgerald assembles the ROC Assistant Chiefs, district commanders, detective supervisors and other key personnel in our Joint Operations Command Center for what is, in essence, a daily, departmentwide accountability session. Using computer-generated maps, statistics and databases projected on the large screens in the JOCC, the officials go over crime problems and patterns of the previous 24 to 48 hours, discuss strategies for addressing those problems, and affix accountability – right then and there – for seeing that those strategies are carried out.

As many of you know, the New York City Police Department pioneered this approach with its highly touted Compstat system. But I truly believe that our department is taking this concept to a new and more rigorous level of accountability with our daily Crime Briefings. These are dynamic, interactive sessions that have our Department focused on neighborhood crime like never before. We have hosted other law enforcement professionals, academic researchers, news reporters and editorial writers, members of the Guardian Angels and other community policing partners at our daily Crime Briefings. And I would like to once again extend an invitation to the members of this Committee, as part of your oversight role, to sit in on these sessions, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how we are managing accountability in the MPD.

Fiscal 2003 has seen other improvements in agency management performance. We continue to operate within our budget, while aggressively seeking out and receiving additional support in the area of grants and federal reimbursements for costs associated with homeland security and preparedness. I know that agency overtime spending remains a major concern of this Committee. In FY 03, we were able to reduce our discretionary overtime spending by maximizing federal reimbursements for heightened terrorism alerts and other federal events. In addition, court overtime spending fell last year, as we continued to implement management reforms. We will always face challenges involving unexpected situations and exigent circumstances in our city that require police

overtime. And we continue to have issues with prosecutors calling several officers for court appearances, when our belief is that only two may be needed for most appearances. But overall, we have made significant progress in controlling our agency overtime spending.

Another important area is hiring and retention. We remain on track to reach our authorized level of 3,800 officers by the end of FY 04. We just graduated another class of recruits on Friday, and had another new class enter the Academy earlier in the week. Recruiting strategies during FY 03 included the introduction of a true online application process – candidates can now submit their initial “paperwork” directly through our website – and a very successful Career Expo last June that attracted more than 550 applicants. I am particularly proud of the fact that, as we are building up to 3,800 officers, we remain among the most diverse police departments in America, and one of the most representative of the communities we serve. We do remain underrepresented in the number of Latino police officers on the force when compared with the growing Latino population in our city. So our current recruitment efforts are paying special attention to finding qualified Latino candidates, as well as more women.

Of course, probably the most serious personnel challenge of fiscal 2003 – and one that continues to challenge us today – is the problem of officers not being available for full duty. As of February 15, the number of sworn officers not available for full duty was 469, with 332 of these on extended sick leave or limited duty. This is down slightly from the FY 03 end-of-year figure of 497, but substantially higher than the year-end total for FY 02, which was 371. In other words, about 1 in 8 of our sworn officers is unable to perform the full duties of a police officer for a variety of reasons, with extended sick leave and limited duty being the largest categories.

Of the 332 who are not available for duty because of medical reasons, a total of 69 – or more than 20 percent – are out on stress-related matters. That number is simply unacceptable. And one of my top priorities is to reduce that number – and reduce it quickly and reduce it significantly. No one ever said that policing was a stress-free job. And while I recognize that job-related stress is a concern in some instances, I am determined to help employees relieve their level of stress so they can return to full duty or, if they are not fit for duty because of stress, to move them off the payroll so that we can fill their slots with officers who are perhaps better equipped to handle the stress of police work. Our department cannot operate efficiently with the number of officers we now have on extended sick leave and limited duty.

To address this issue, our Human Services Division has initiated a number of steps. These include a new stress protocol that redefines and limits performance-of-duty stress to that which results from critical incidents such as police-involved shootings. We are also implementing more careful, up-front screening of performance-of-duty claims, as well as more strenuous monitoring of officers on extended sick leave and limited duty, with required medical appointments every two weeks. We are also getting tougher on officers who miss appointments at the clinic; they will be considered AWOL and won't be paid. Finally, we are working to improve and streamline the procedures for referring disability retirement cases to the Police and Firefighters Retirement and Relief Board. We currently estimate that there are about 100 cases that should be referred to the Board involving personnel who are not going to make it back to full duty. I am confident that these internal reforms, combined with proposal legislation that is now before the Council, will help us better control and manage officer

availability – and, as a result, ensure that we have as many full-duty officers as possible out on the streets.

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There are a number of other performance-related issues that I will not be able to cover in depth in my testimony today. For example, our Department has continued to make significant progress in the areas of emergency preparedness and homeland security. These include continued advancements in training, technology and tactics, including the formation of our Special Threat Action Teams to serve as the “first” of first responders in case of a terrorist attack.

We also continue to make significant progress in our traffic safety efforts. Just last week, we activated the nation’s first stationary photo radar speeding reduction camera in the 600 block of Florida Avenue, NE, in front of Gallaudet University. Our other photo enforcement programs continue to show amazing results in reducing aggressive driving. These programs have allowed our officers to concentrate on other traffic safety priorities, including drunk driving and underage drinking.

During FY 03 our community outreach efforts continued to expand. We hosted two community assemblies with DC’s Latino communities. We expanded our Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit. We held a very successful Youth Problem Solving Partnership Program. And we opened two new, community-based facilities in Northwest: the new 4D-1 (soon to be 3D-1) substation on Park Road, NW, and the new ROC-North headquarters on Shepherd Street, NW.

These and other efforts are all geared toward making the Metropolitan Police Department a more effective agency, and making the District of Columbia a safer and more livable city. On the whole, I believe we continued to make significant progress toward these goals during fiscal year 2003 and the first five months of FY 04. Problems remain, of course, and new challenges lie ahead. But I sincerely believe our Department and our city are in a better position today when it comes to crime and disorder than we were a year ago. And I am confident that one year from now, we will be even better in the critical areas of crime fighting, emergency communications, criminal investigation and agency management.

I thank you for the opportunity to read this detailed testimony into the record. My staff and I will be happy to entertain your questions.